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EARL W. FOELL

At a Teflon summit, can Reagan and Gorbachev make any bargain stick?

FORMER national-security adviser Richard Pipes says he hopes President Reagan will find a reason to meet Mikhail Gorbachev in Europe rather than in the United States. Mr. Pipes is concerned that holding the projected US-USSR summit in Washington could create a wave of euphoria and over-relaxation by the US public.

West German Chancellor Helmut Kohl, who has pushed for a summit for two years, argues in part that it should be a remedy for ignorance on the part of Politburo leaders of how the US *really* works. He believes that KGB boss Yuri Andropov and his protégé, Gorbachev, had access to an unprecedented flow of facts about American society — but still didn't understand it. That argues for a summit being better if it's held in Washington.

Columnist George Will and other members of the Carthage-must-be-destroyed school of Soviet relations argue that there's no point in bargaining with a government sworn to undermine the West.

In short, Mr. Reagan has plenty of conflicting advice from Sherpas who do and don't want him to climb to a summit — and from those who have different pet routes to the top.

Advice from this column is that he's doing quite well so far, following his own instincts. Reagan was correct to tender an invitation when he did. It outflanked criticism of him for not attending the Chernenko funeral. It created no danger of an over-rushed, unprepared meeting. Mr. Gorbachev and his collective leadership don't want that any more than does Mr. Reagan's official family.

If Gorbachev wants to try working on Western European leaders first, before seeing Mr. Reagan, the Soviet leader is likely to find he is no more successful at driving a wedge into the Western alliance than were his predecessors on the issue of Pershing II and cruise missiles. His KGB-designed tour of Britain was a personal success but didn't shift the Thatcher government's defense plans.

The major remaining issue is whether to hold (1) a so-called "getting to know you" summit or (2) a meeting to ratify a substantive agreement between the two countries.

Veterans of earlier Soviet-American summits almost invariably favor the latter. They say it helps to make both sides more businesslike. And it provides plenty of get-acquainted time, anyway — at breakfast or after dinner.

Political scientists have been fascinated by the idea of the two "Teflon" leaders meeting. Mr. Reagan earned the half-admiring, half-denigrating title of Teflon president because of the way he calmly slid past crises and questionable appointments that would have adhered like barnacles to another president. Gorbachev won a similar sobriquet from Western Kremlinologists because of his swift ascent to power despite a sobering six straight years of bad harvests during his guidance of Soviet agriculture.

Those bad harvests, plus other widely noted Soviet economic problems, suggest the most likely area for a substantive deal to be signed at a Reagan-Gorbachev summit.

Soviet factories need Western machine tools badly for modernization. American and European machine-tool industries are beset by competition from Japanese and other East Asian producers.

The whole Soviet food and agriculture sector needs new ideas, technology, and food-processing factories — not to mention grain and meat imports. As everyone by now knows, the American food and agriculture sector badly needs to increase its exports.

In the not-too-distant future, Gorbachev and Company will require petroleum drilling and piping equipment as they tap more remote fields. The American petroleum exploration and extraction industry needs more business.

Ditto nonstrategic high technology.

In his whirlwind but short-lived economic reform program, Andropov, Gorbachev's last mentor, followed an essentially Pavlovian scheme of reward and punishment. His stick was factory discipline: a crackdown on absenteeism, malingering, on-the-job drinking, and corrupt management. His carrot: promises of more and better consumer goods for workers and their families. Gorbachev appears to be continuing this approach. He has talked both of "intensification" of the economy (read: discipline) and more reward for productivity. But to provide a carrot he will need quality goods that must come from Western trade and credits.

Whether the fruits of his policy in the long run benefit the Soviet civilian economy or the military-industrial complex remains a question. That, inevitably, is the reason that arms control talks and trade talks become interlinked.

At a summit, Reagan and Gorbachev will have to talk about arms control and the broader realm of defense

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strategy and philosophy. They should spend plenty of time offstage getting a feel for each other's world outlook — with only a few aides present. But arms agreements are too distant to provide a core for any early summit. Trade talks, by contrast, went well in a first round last fall in Moscow. And discussions between Soviet officials and US Jewish groups over Jewish emigration have been making some progress in the past month. In short, the obstacles to some kind of US-Soviet trade agreement are fewer than the obstacles in any other field except expanded cultural exchanges.

So expanded trade and cultural exchanges appear the most likely areas around which to build a summit. Mr. Reagan has the high ground after issuing the invitation. It remains to be seen whether Mr. Gorbachev will try to seek trade and credit deals in Western Europe, turn to Washington, or do both.

Earl W. Foell is editor in chief of The Christian Science Monitor.